Dorian Gray Compared To The Elephant Man Essay, Research Paper

At the beginning of The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde, Basil paints a portrait of Dorian Gray. Throughout the novel, Dorian is viewed and is treated by the world as art. As art, Dorian is constantly changed by the influences of his different artists. The most influential and main artist of Dorian is Lord Henry. Lord Henry corrupts Dorian into a vain, selfish, arrogant, hedonistic, and cruel man. A similar artist to art relation exists between Mr. Bytes and John Merrick in the Elephant Man. Mr. Bytes runs a carnival freak show and displays John as the Elephant Man. His major deformities attract business. Mr. Bytes changes John by making him feel as though he was a less than human monster and by causing the world to view him as such.

John was found and claimed by Mr. Bytes when he was a boy. For his entire life, John has been displayed as a freak by his owner, Mr. Bytes. Just as animals are owned by humans, so is John by Mr. Bytes. This dehumanization of John continues as he is constantly displayed as an animal. As a result of this is, John no longer believes himself a human, but rather an animal. This is clearly seen when Mr. Treves purchases John, again as an animal, from Mr. Bytes. When John is asked to talk, Mr. Bytes answers that he cannot, and later when John is asked by Mr. Treves to talk, privately, he responds, “I am not supposed to talk.” John does not say that he does not speak well, or that he does not know how, but that he is not supposed to talk, because animals do not talk. Even if he is saying that Mr. Bytes does not want him to talk, he has caused John to believe that he should not talk either. Mr. Bytes has convinced John, by years of dehumanization, to believe that he is a monster. He is the artist who makes John think that he is an animal.

When the reader first meets Dorian, it is only through a story told by Basil. Basil’s story reveals little, if anything, about Dorian. Similarly, when Lady Brandon describes Dorian, nothing is revealed about him. Little about Dorian is revealed in the beginning of the book, because there is nothing to tell about him: he is unfinished. He is pure, innocent, and uninteresting. Only when Lord Henry meets Dorian does he become interesting as well as corrupt. Coincidentally, it is only after Lord Henry talks to Dorian alone in the garden and tells him about vanity, arrogance, and hedonism, that the painting is complete. This clearly is a reference to the defilement of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as Lord Henry begins his contamination in the garden. Lord Henry tells Dorian to be vain: “Because you have the most marvelous youth, and youth is the one thing worth having…You have a wonderful beautiful face…And beauty is a from of genius” (38). Lord Henry teaches Dorian to worship his youth because that is what makes him beautiful. This causes Dorian to make the wish to stay forever like the painting, young and beautiful, which causes the rest of his descent into evil. This is the first of Lord Henry’s many propagandized decay of Dorian Gray.

Mr. Bytes does not only convince John that he is an animal, but the world too. At first, John’s show is closed because the crowd could not handle John’s ugliness. At this point John is sub-human. Although the world begins to realize that John is human while in the care of Mr. Treves, when Mr. Bytes steals John back and returns him to the freak show, he again creates him into a monster. The world views John as a monster again and still persecutes him for his ugliness. Their prejudice has not changed. In the subway, John bumps into a little girl and she cries. A crowd builds and chases John down. As they begin to approach, John shouts, “I am not an animal!” Although Mr. Bytes has again brought the ugliness out in John, he has failed this time to dehumanize him. John has learned that he is not an animal. Within a few days, John kills himself.

Dorian continues his life of deception and cruelties. He causes a young woman’s death and even kills Basil. The world how ever still treats him like art. As art is unchanging, the world refuses to see the change in Dorian’s personality and only can view him as beautiful. Lord Henry, by indirectly causing Dorian’s youth, has caused the world to view Dorian as art. This view never changes, because as art, Dorian never changes. Although the world’s view of him does not change, his view of himself does. Dorian has learnt what an animal he has become. He curses himself, and says that he must kill the past, so as he tries to destroy the painting he kills himself.

Lord Henry and Mr. Bytes corrupt their art. Lord Henry pollutes Dorian and causes him to be evil. Mr. Bytes causes John to believe that he is an animal. Lord Henry and Mr. Bytes also both change the way the world views their art. Mr. Bytes focuses on John’s deformities and makes the world view John as an animal. This causes the world to think that John is evil. By convincing Dorian that his youth is everything, Dorian makes a wish to retain his youth forever. Lord Henry has caused Dorian to look beautiful forever. This causes the world to only see Dorian’s beauty and continuously see him as good. Similarly, both Dorian and John conclude what they really are. John understands that what people think and how he looks, mean nothing. What you are is not based on looks or thoughts but on actions. Dorian realizes this very same conclusion. He realizes that he did nothing in his life and enjoyed nothing with his beauty. Dorian hates himself and his beauty. In the end, he knows that he has done wrong and concludes that looks are nothing; actions define who you are.

357